



Eric Yee and Lawrence Trujillo — guitarists and work colleagues

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A capacity crowd at an Albuquerque venue goes wild as popular recording artist Lorenzo Antonio and his band take the stage. A mariachi band quickly sets down a Latin beat while the main band's rhythm section accompanies it with a hint of American country.

Adding to this distinctly New Mexican cocktail are guitarists Eric Yee and Lawrence Trujillo who both work at the Laboratory's plutonium facility (which is known as TA-55).

"I picked up the guitar when I was about 13," says Trujillo. "I used to listen to my dad and uncles play, and I asked them if they could teach me. They showed me a few things, and it just took off from there."

"For me, I was inspired by these other kids at school walking around carrying their guitar cases," adds Yee. "So, at age 13 I took a class on how to play guitar, to find out what it was like. I've never looked back."

Jamming at the Lab

Trujillo prefers country music and Yee rock and roll, but both men found a mutual love of Música Nuevo Mexicana (New Mexico Music), a genre of music that builds upon Hispanic folk music with American country, blues, jazz, rockabilly, and pop-driven rock and roll. This type of music really took off during the 1970s, with artists such as Al Hurricane and Freddie Brown popularizing the musical genre.

"It was TA-55 here in Los Alamos that brought us together," says Yee with a laugh. "I was jamming with a guitarist by the name of Harold Sanchez in the crafts breakroom. One day Lawrence walked around the corner, and Harold tells me, 'You know, Lawrence here plays guitar also.' When I heard him play, all I could say was, 'whoa!'"

At the time Yee was the lone guitar player supporting pioneer recording artist Al Hurricane, who was looking to add another guitarist to join their busy band. Hurricane asked for suggestions, and Yee immediately recommended Trujillo.

Yee and Trujillo play with many members of the Sanchez family, who are all famous in their own right: Al Hurricane (known as the "godfather of New Mexico music"), his son Al Hurricane, Jr., Lorenzo Antonio (Hurricane Sr. is his uncle), and Sparx (who are Antonio's sisters).

Helping Write the Hits

Yee and Trujillo have learned that each band leader brings with him or her certain ways of working.

“When I hear the beginnings of a song, the first thing I like to do is figure out its rhythm,” explains Trujillo. “Once I have a good idea about the song’s rhythmic structure, I can begin to work on the guitar hooks and leads.”

“It’s a little different for me,” says Yee. “Like when I was working with Al Senior, he would send down a song complete with the lyrics. So, for me I go to Lawrence to help me out with the phrasing, from which I build the rhythm. I like the spontaneity of rock music, but when it comes to songs with strong melody lines, the guitar’s rhythm needs to complement the phrasing of the words.”

Although Trujillo continues to play for the Sanchez family bands, Yee has decided to take a break from performing to focus on his job at TA-55. “It was an amazing 12 years, but the Laboratory’s mission is my top priority right now,” he says.

Los Alamos National Laboratory

www.lanl.gov

(505) 667-7000

Los Alamos, NM

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